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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: REGIME TURNS UP THE HEAT ON JORDAN,S MUSLIM
BROTHERS

REF: A. AMMAN 4651
[B](#). AMMAN 3507

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The GOJ accused the Muslim Brotherhood,s extensive charity network of financial irregularities and announced prosecutors will soon open legal proceedings against the charities, board of directors. The move intensifies the ongoing confrontation between the GOJ and the Brotherhood over four members of Parliament arrested after they paid condolence calls to the family of Abu Mus'ab Al-Zarqawi. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Jordan,s cabinet decided on July 5 to refer to the public prosecutor corruption charges against the chief officers of the Muslim Brotherhood,s charitable wing. The Islamic Center Charity Society runs a network of health clinics, schools, orphanages, and the Islamic Hospital in Amman. The state wire service announced the move.

[1](#)3. (U) The Society,s institutions are worth on the order of \$700 million, and have been built up over the course of forty years with pious donations. They provide services to thousands of Jordanians each day, and account for much of the Brotherhood,s popular appeal in Jordan. They also provide the Brotherhood and Islamic Action Front with a source of patronage and institutional depth.

[1](#)4. (C) Foreign Minister Khatib, Royal Office Director Awadallah, and Prime Minister Bakhit separately briefed the Ambassador July 5 and 6 on this development. Bakhit showed the Ambassador a report on the GOJ,s audit, four inches thick. The allegations of financial improprieties were significant, and were based on the society,s own documentation. Over the years, the society had underreported to the government its revenue and spending and covered up instances of malfeasance by senior MB figures. Bakhit said the current board of directors of the society would be compelled to resign, and a new board formed, to enable it to continue to function. Bakhit said much of the information in the audit report was made available to the government in 2001, but was then swept under the rug.

[1](#)5. (C) This step comes amidst a crisis over government charges that four members of parliament from the Brotherhood,s political wing incited discord and terrorism when paying a condolence call on the family of Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi (ref A). Khatib and Awadallah told the Ambassador the GOJ,s strategy was to use the threat of prosecution of the charitable wing in order to compel the movement to apologize for the four MPs, incitement. They said a statement from the MB condemning terrorism and disavowing takfirism would resolve the crisis. The PM is banking on a split between radicals and moderates - which falls roughly on a West Banker/East Banker fault line within the movement - to weaken the MB,s stand. He told the Ambassador there were

signs already of traditional, moderate more nationalist leaders trying to reduce the rhetoric and end the crisis. On July 4 the website of the Brotherhood,s political wing featured a strident statement calling for the prosecution of the officials responsible for the detention of the four MPs. The statement was later taken down, and on July 6 the movement,s spokesman, Rahel Al-Gharaibeh, publicly disavowed the July 4 web posting, though he did not issue an apology for the MPs, actions.

¶6. (C) If the MB fails to meet the government,s demands, Bakhit seemed confident of parliamentary support for prosecuting at least one of the offending MPs, who had made especially egregious statements praising Zargawi as a martyr. He asserted he only needed a simple majority (our contacts claim a 2/3 majority was needed to strip immunity from a member of parliament). However, Khatib indicated it was preferable to resolve the matter before the government/civil society "retreat" begins in July, to enable the MB to join in that effort to form broad-based consensus for reform and anti-terrorist legislation before parliament reconvenes in August. Bakhit believed that in any event, moderate nationalists in the Islamic movement could be induced to break ranks and join the retreat.

¶7. (C) Comment: This is the most serious confrontation between the regime and the MB since Abdullah came to power. If both sides act true to past form, a compromise solution will emerge. The King and his top aides are concerned that the movement was energized by the Hamas victory next door, and they are angered by the public condoling of Zargawi. They have also calculated that those condolences put the MB on the wrong side of public opinion, so it was time to go on the attack. But the sentiment in parliament, according to our sources, is to accuse the government of overreacting and

to defend legislators, alleged right to say anything, however outrageous. As for the strategy of pressuring the MB with charges of corruption - almost certainly the brainchild of GID Director Dhahabi - the movement may choose to accept prompt investigation of any wrongdoing, but the movement,s other options include non-cooperation with any government-appointed board, a strategy which might disrupt services to thousands of Jordanians. The risk for the government is that popular opinion will conclude the charges against the charities were trumped up as a means to pressure oppositionists. That is the impression left with the public after the campaign to use evidence of Hamas arms smuggling to justify cancellation of Hamas Foreign Minister Zahar,s visit in April (ref B.)
Hale